

The Minor Prophets
Lesson 15: The Lion Roars
(Amos 1-2)

Introduction To Amos:

- **Key People:** Amos, Amaziah, Jeroboam II
- **Date Written:** Probably during the reigns of Jeroboam II of Israel and Uzziah of Judah. Approximately 760-750 BC.
- **Purpose:** To pronounce God's judgment upon Israel, the northern kingdom, for its complacency, idolatry, and oppression of the poor.
- **Author:** Amos
- **To whom written:** Israel, the northern kingdom, and God's people everywhere.
- **Setting:** The wealthy people of Israel were enjoying peace and prosperity. They were quite complacent and were oppressing the poor, even selling them into slavery. Soon, however, Israel would be conquered by Assyria, and the rich would themselves become slaves.
- **The Christ of Amos:** The clearest anticipation of Christ in Amos is found at the end of the book. He has all authority to judge (1:1-9:10), but He will also restore His people (9:11-15).
- **The Key Verses:** "But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream." (Amos 5:24 NASB)

Getting Started

Amos ("burden bearer") was a herdsman and a cultivator of sycamore trees (Amos 1:1; 7:14) when the Lord called him to be a prophet. He lived in the village of Tekoa, about eleven miles from Jerusalem, during the reigns of Uzziah in Judah (790-740 BC) and Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom of Israel (793-753 BC). Amos was a layman, a humble farmer and shepherd who was not an official member of the Jewish religious or political establishment.

At this time, both Judah and Israel were enjoying prosperity and security. Luxury abounded (3:10-15; 5:1-6), and religion was popular. Israel flocked to the royal chapel at Bethel (4:4-5), and Judah celebrated the feasts enthusiastically (5:21-22), but the sins of both nations were eroding the religious and moral fiber of the people. Making money was more important than worshipping God (8:5); the rich exploited the poor, the judicial system was corrupt, and injustice flourished (5:11-15; 8:4-6).

Amos declared God's judgment not only on the Gentile nations but also on Israel and Judah. It was a call to repent of "ritual religion" and seek the Lord sincerely. He warned the aristocrats that God would judge them for the way they were abusing the poor. In spite of the nations' peace and prosperity, Amos saw the end coming and warned the people to prepare to meet their God.

One of the key verses in Amos is 5:24—*"But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a never-failing stream!"* (NIV)—a command the nations need to obey today.

- What is significant about Amos's profession prior to his call to prophesy? What does this tell us about how God chooses His prophets? What does it teach us about how God can use "common" people even today?
- Choose one verse or phrase from Amos 1-2 that stands out to you. This could be something you're intrigued by something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper. The Lion Roars

If the prophet Amos were to come to our world today, he would probably feel very much at home; for he lived at a time such as ours, when society was changing radically. Both Israel and Judah were at peace with their neighbors, which meant that their wealth and energy could be used for developing their nations instead of fighting their enemies. Both kingdoms were prosperous, their cities were expanding rapidly; and a new wealthy merchant class was developing in society. The two kingdoms were moving from agricultural to a commercial society and experiencing both the benefits and problems that come with that change.

However, in spite of their material success, all was not well with God's chosen people. They were experiencing what British poet Oliver Goldsmith wrote about back in 1770:

...ill fares the land, to hast'ning ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay...

There were ills a plenty in all the lands of that day, the Gentile nations as well as the Jewish kingdoms of Israel and Judah; and Amos wasn't afraid to name them. He opened his book with a denunciation of the sins of six Gentile nations, and no doubt the people of Israel and Judah applauded his words. Nothing would make the Jews happier than to see the Lord judge the surrounding nations. But when Amos denounced Judah and Israel, that was a different story; and his popularity began to suffer at that point.

- What were some of the ills God's people were experiencing? What unpopular message did Amos give God's people? What sort of message might they have been expecting from God? What does this teach us about how God gets right to the heart of the matter?

I. Judgment On The Gentile Nations (1:2-2:3)

God wanted to get the nations' attention, but people weren't listening. You'd think they could hear a lion roar or the thunder roll and know that danger was at hand. God was speaking ("thundering") from Jerusalem, for judgment always begins at the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17). God had sent drought to the land so that the fruit would not grow, but that didn't bring the people to their knees. God called a common farmer to preach to His people and warn them. Look at Amos 3:8 NKJV, "A Lion has Roared!..."

Eight times Amos used the phrase "for three transgressions and for four," a Jewish idiom that means "an indefinite number that has finally come to the end." God is longsuffering with sinners (2 Peter 3:9), but He marks what they do, and His patience eventually runs out. To try God's patience is to tempt the Lord; and when we tempt the Lord we invite judgment.

- Review Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, and 13. In what ways does God exercise longsuffering with sinners/ (see 2 Peter 3:9). Does His patience run out? Explain. In what ways is testing God's patience similar to tempting God?

a. Syria (vv. 3-15)

- i. Damascus was the capital of Syria, one of the Jew's persistent enemies.
 - ii. Amos denounced the Syrians for their inhuman treatment of the Israelites who lived in Gilead, east of the Jordan River. They cruelly "threshed them" as though they were nothing but stalks of grain.
 - iii. God had called the Syrians to punish Israel (2 Kings 10:32-33; 13:1-9), but the Syrians had carried it too far.
 - iv. The phrase "I will send a fire" (Amos 1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14) means "I will send judgment"; for fire represents the holiness and judgment of God (Deut. 4:11, 24, 36; Heb. 12:29).
 - v. The Lord did judge Syria: The dynasty of King Hazael ended; his son Ben-Hadad was defeated; Damascus lost its power (business was done at the city gate, Amos 1:5); and "the house of Eden" (delight, paradise) became a ruin.
 - vi. King Josiah defeated Ben-Hadad three times, but it was the Assyrians who finally subdued Syria and took them into captivity.
- What is it about fire that makes it a fitting image of judgment? How is that imagery reframed in the new Testament (Matt. 3:7-12; 1 Cor. 3:10-15)? What does fire represent in the redemption story?

b. Philistia (vv. 6-8)

- i. Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron were the five key Philistine cities (Josh. 13:3) and Amos denounced all of them for trading in human lives.
- ii. They raided Jewish villages and captured people to be sold as slaves. To add insult to injury, the Philistines sold these slaves to

Israel's ancient enemies, the Edomites. Since Edom was descended from Esau, Jacob's brother, it was a case of brother enslaving brother. (God had something to say to Edom in Amos 1:11-12).

- iii. Throughout the history of ancient Israel, slavery was practiced, but the law of Moses clearly governed how slaves were treated. The law that permitted slavery at the same time protected the slaves. It was one thing to put a prisoner of war to work and quite something else to kidnap innocent people and sell them like cattle. Neither Jesus nor the apostles openly denounce slavery, but they made it clear that all people are sinners whom God loves and that all saved people are one and equal in Christ (Gal. 3:26-29).
- iv. God's judgment on Philistia came in the days of King Uzziah (2 Kings 18:7-8) and the Assyrian invaders under Sargon and the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. The slave masters themselves were taken into exile and slavery.

c. Tyre (vv.9-10)

- i. Amos moved from Damascus in the northeast to the Philistine cities in the southwest, and now he sets his sights straight north on Phoenicia and its major city, Tyre.
- ii. During the reigns of David and Solomon, Israel had a warm relationship with the people of Tyre (1 King 5:1). Amos called it "the brotherly covenant" ("treaty of brotherhood" NIV), suggesting that the "covenant" was more than a treaty but involved a friendly partnership that went deeper than politics. People of different nations don't have to agree on their religious practices or political structure but can still treat one another like fellow human beings.
- iii. Tyre, however, committed the same sins as the Philistine cities by selling Jewish captives to the Edomites as slaves (Amos 1:6-8). When Ezekiel gave his funeral dirge celebrating the fall of Tyre, he mentioned this grievous sin (Ezek. 27:13).
- iv. But Tyre's sin was worse than that of the Philistia because Tyre was violating a long-standing compact that was based on friendship and mutual respect for humanity. Tyre was selling friends as slaves!
- v. Judgment came in 322 BC when Alexander the Great wiped Tyre off the face of the earth and left it a place for drying nets (Ezek. 26:5, 14).

- Review Amos 1:9-10. Why is it notable that Tyre was given such harsh judgment, even though it was once an ally? What does this reveal about God's ongoing judgment of the world? What does it teach us about God's sovereignty?

d. Edom (vv. 11-12)

- i. The Edomites nursed a long-standing grudge against the Jews, perpetuating ancient rivalry between Jacob and Esau, which began before the twin boys were born (Gen. 25:21-26). In His sovereign will, God had chosen the younger brother, Jacob, to receive the blessing of the birthright and the Abrahamic covenant.
 1. Esau despised his spiritual heritage and willingly sold his birthright to Jacob.
 2. But because Jacob cheated him out of his patriarchal blessing, Esau vowed to kill Jacob.
 3. They later reconciled briefly, but enmity continued.
 4. As far as biblical record is concerned, their final meeting was at a funeral, where they buried their father but did not bury their bitterness.
 - ii. The Edomites would not allow their Jewish cousins to pass through their land during Israel's march to Canaan. King Saul suppressed the Edomite army, and David conquered them (1Sam. 14:47; 2 Sam. 8:14). Edom revolted against Judah and won their freedom (2 Kings 8:16-22).
 - iii. Amos condemned the Edomites for their persistent hatred of the Jews, "...because his anger raged continually, and his fury flamed unchecked" (Amos 1:11 NIV). When the Babylonians attacked and captured Jerusalem, the Edomites assisted the enemy and gave vent to their anger (Obad. 10-14; see Ps. 137:7)
 - iv. Temen and Bozrah were strong cities that today don't exist. The Edomites lived "in the clefts of the rocks" and had their "nest among the stars" (Obad. 3-4), boasting that their fortresses were impregnable; but the Lord destroyed their nation so thoroughly that nothing is left today except ruins. When the Romans attacked Jerusalem in AD 70, they destroyed what was left of the Edomite people, and Edom was no more.
- Why did the Edomites despise their Jewish cousins? (See the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25:27-34, 27:1-4, and Hebrews 12:16-17.) Why are there so many biblical accounts of enmity between brothers? In what ways does this sort of familial dissension or disagreement affect the modern church?

e. Ammon (vv. 13-15)

- i. The Ammonites and Moabites (Amos 2:1-3) were the descendants of Lot through his incestuous union with his daughters (Gen. 19:30-38). They were ruthless people who were the avowed enemies of the Jews. In order to enlarge their land, they invaded Gilead; and

not satisfied with attacking the men defending their homeland, the Ammonites killed women and children. To the Ammonites, land was more important than people, including defenseless women and innocent children.

- ii. Amos announced that a storm of judgment would come to the people of Ammon and that their capital city (Rabbah) would be destroyed. This took place when the Assyrians swept over the land in 734 BC.
- iii. The chief god of Edom was Molech, which means “reigning one, king.” Amos 1:15 could be translated, “Molech will go into exile,” thus showing the inability of their god to save them.

f. Moab (vv. 2:1-3)

- i. Animosity between Moab and Israel began very early, when the Moabites refused to give the Jews passage on the major highway (Deut. 23:3-4; Judges 11:17). The king of Moab also hired Balaam to curse Israel, and then the Moabite women seduced the Jewish men to commit fornication and idolatry (Numbers 22-25).
- ii. During the period of the judges, Israel was subject to the Moabites for eighteen years.
- iii. What was the sin of Moab? Disrespect for the dead and for royalty. We don't know which king's remains were subject to this humiliation, but the deed disgraced the memory of the king and humiliated the people of Edom.
- iv. For the most part, society today shows respect for the dead, but ancient Eastern people protected their dead even more.
- v. Amos announced that the king of Moab and his officials were all guilty and would be destroyed, along with their cities. Moab was taken by Assyria, and the land eventually became home of numerous nomadic tribes. The nation of Moab was no more.

Before we listen to God's message to Judah and Israel, we should pause to reflect on the messages we have just studied that were delivered to six Gentile nations. *God expected these Gentiles to listen to a Jewish prophet and heed what he said.* Though not under the Mosaic law, these nations were responsible to God for what they did; and responsibility brings accountability.

God sees what the nations do, and He judges them accordingly. God is still on the throne and will punish evildoers in His good time.

II. Judgment On The Kingdom of Judah (2:4-5)

- a. In his six messages, Amos had announced judgment to the nations surrounding Israel and Judah, starting with Syria in the northwest and ending with the trans-Jordanic nations of Ammon, Moab, and Edom.

- b. As his fellow Jews heard these denunciations of the Gentiles, no doubt they applauded and wanted to hear more. But when Amos focused on Israel and Judah (his own land), that changed their attitude completely.
 - c. The temple was filled with people bringing their sacrifices, but Judah was a nation given over to idolatry. “Their lies (idols) lead them astray, lies which their fathers followed” (2:4 NKJV). They were wandering like lost animals and like drunken men.
 - d. The Gentiles had sinned against their conscience and the laws of brotherhood and humanity, but the Jews had despised and rejected the very laws of God, given to them by Moses. Theirs was the greater sin, for greater privilege always brings greater responsibility (Rom. 2:17-3:9).
 - e. God had frequently punished His people in their land by allowing various nations to attack and subdue them, but now He would punish them out of their land. The Babylonian army would destroy Jerusalem and take thousands of captives to Babylon where they would live in the midst of gross idolatry for seventy years.
 - f. However, unlike the six Gentile nations Amos denounced, Judah would not be destroyed but would be spared. In His mercy, God would allow a remnant of Jews to return to establish the nation and rebuild the temple.
- Review Amos 2:4-5. How was this judgment different from past judgments against God’s people? What’s significant about the fact that God would judge them out of their land? In what ways was the threat of being taken captive by the Babylonians a more severe judgment than being invaded by other nations?

III. Judgment On The Kingdom of Israel (2:6-16)

Both Israel and Judah were enjoying peace and prosperity, and divine judgment was the furthest thing from their minds. Remember, Jewish theology equated prosperity with God’s blessing; and as long as the people were enjoying “the good life,” they were sure God was pleased with them. They knew what the law said about their sins, but they chose to ignore the warnings.

- a. Amos first exposes their sinful present and names three flagrant sins. To begin with, the people of the northern kingdom were guilty of *injustice* (Amos 2:6-7).
 - i. Supported by corrupt judges, the rich were suing the poor, who couldn’t pay their bills, and forcing them into servitude and slavery. Even if they couldn’t pay for a pair of shoes, the poor were neither forgiven nor assisted.
 - ii. Instead, they were trampled like the dust of the earth. As we will see, Amos has a great deal to say about caring for the poor.
- b. Their second gross sin was *immorality* (Amos 2:7b), with fathers and sons visiting the same prostitutes! These may have been “cult prostitutes” who were a part of the heathen idolatrous worship. Thus,

there was a double sin involved: immorality and idolatry. Or, the girl may have been a household servant or a common prostitute.

- i. You would think that a father would want to be a better example to his son by obeying the law of Moses.
 - ii. Perhaps what's described here is a form of incest, which was, of course, strictly forbidden by Moses.
- c. The third sin was open *idolatry* (Amos 2:8).
- i. Wealthy men took their debtor's garments as pledges but did not return them at sundown as the law commanded. Instead, these rich sinners visited pagan altars, where they got drunk on wine purchased with the fines they exacted from the poor. Then in their drunken state, they slept by the altars on other people's garments defiling the garments and disobeying the law.
- d. After describing their sinful present, Amos reminded them of their glorious past (Amos 2:9-12)
- i. God had led His people out of Egypt, cared for them in the wilderness, and destroyed other nations so the Jews could claim their inheritance in Canaan.
 - ii. He gave them His Word through chosen prophets, and He raised up dedicated people like the Nazirites to be examples of devotion to God.
 - iii. But instead of being humbled by these blessings, the people rebelled against the Lord by rejecting the messages of the prophets and forcing the Nazirites to break their holy vows. The Jews wanted neither the Word of God nor examples of godly living.
- e. Amos closed his message with the announcement of their terrible future (Amos 2:13-16). Israel would be crushed by their own sins just as a loaded cart crushes whatever it rolls over. Judgment is coming and nobody will be able to escape.
- f. Yes, the Assyrian would invade Israel (720 BC) and the nation would be no more.

- Review Amos 2:4-5. How was this judgment different from past judgments against God's people? What's significant about the fact that God would judge them out of their land? In what ways was the threat of being taken captive by the Babylonians a more severe judgment than being invaded by other nations?

Amos has looked around with eyes gifted with prophetic insight, and he has seen and announced what God would do to six Gentile nations and to the kingdom of Judah and Israel. The Lion has roared! Next, the prophet will look within and expose the corruption in the hearts of the Jewish people by explaining four divine calls.

We need to pause and ask ourselves whether we truly fear God and seek to obey His will. Just because we enjoy a measure of peace and prosperity, it doesn't mean God is

pleased with us. For that matter, the goodness of God ought to lead us to repentance, as it did the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:17; Rom. 2:4).

Looking Inward

- Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of **Amos 1-2**. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matter in your life today.
- How would you respond if God called you to be a prophet today? What would you fear most? How would you approach the idea of telling the world potentially unsettling news?
- How do you know when someone is speaking for God and when that person is speaking for just himself or herself? What are the tests you use to verify God's voice in a matter?
- How do messages of God's judgment affect you? Are they frightening? Familiar and, therefore, without much impact? Do you take them to heart or think of them as applying to someone else? How easy is it for you to want to worship a God of judgment?

Going Forward

- Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember, this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).
- Do you want to learn how to better hear God's voice? Be specific. Go back through Amos 1-2 and put a star to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Seeking Help

- Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence), inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Homework: **Read Amos 3-4**. Next week we will look at "**What God Says.**"